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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7153  
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4528  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8424  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5651  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2877  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3073  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4914  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5515  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0118  
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RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0599  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002817

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ASEC](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BROTHELS, BARS, AND ANGRY EL ALTO PARENTS  
REF: LA PAZ 2793

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. Angry parents burned more than 50 bars and brothels in the city of El Alto October 15-17. The apparently impromptu protests started as a peaceful march protesting lack of funding for school classrooms, but grew into violent reaction to the proximity of schools to bars, which parents allege solicit minors. The protests continued as of the morning of October 18. The city of about a million, neighboring La Paz, is living up to its reputation for frequent, sometimes violent political protests. An El Alto civic group also led about 2,000 in an October 17 protest in front of the Embassy demanding the extradition of former President Sanchez de Lozada. End Summary.

Parents: Closing Time for El Alto Pubs  
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¶2. (U) Protesters armed with sticks, stones, and pickaxes ransacked and burned about 30 bars and brothels in three central El Alto neighborhoods October 15-17. The protests started October 15 and were originally spurred by the refusal of the Bolivian Government to honor a promise to build 1,000 school classrooms in 2006 and 2007. El Alto Mayor Fanor Nava led a march of 10,000 to the Ministry of Education to protest President Morales' apparent refusal to release funds to the city government. Morales' October 14 decision to spend \$400,000 in Venezuelan funds elsewhere further infuriated the protesters. Later in the afternoon, after the protesters returned, about 1,000 angry parents in the neighborhood of Rio Seco and burned four bars near schools that were accused of soliciting minors with alcohol and narcotics.

El Alto Goes Wild  
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¶3. (U) The protests unexpectedly spread and grew in intensity October 16 to two other neighborhoods. About 30 bars and brothels were razed, shutting down one of two main routes to the national airport for a few hours. The protests gained momentum after the discovery of three police uniforms in a brothel, adding credence to existing local suspicion of police collusion with prostitution rings. The same day, an El Alto parent group threatened to block all access to El

Alto if President Evo Morales did not meet with them to discuss classroom funding. Six members of the group declared a hunger strike. Hundreds of high-school students joined the protests October 17. Following a public statement from Mayor Nava early October 17 that the police would not allow "illegal" establishments to reopen, officials expected the protests to wind down and the numbers of protesters did decrease October 18 from the prior days' peaks of more than 2,000. However, protests continue as of the morning of October 18 and the police issued alerts in seven of 10 El Alto neighborhoods. Protesters have turned against bars and brothels more generally, not just those near schools, as a source of open-all-night crime and insecurity. "We will burn," said student leader Remberto Cruz late October 17. "We are not going to talk to the city government or the mayor." Press reports at least 50 bars and brothels have been burned or gutted of possessions for bonfires. There have been no reported fatalities or serious injuries so far.

#### Police/Officials Fiddle While Bars Burn

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¶4. (C) Police assertions that the uniforms were planted and that they will not allow "illegal" establishments to reopen are being largely ignored by protesters, who accuse them of being accomplices to bar and brothel owners. Although police have scarcely attempted to impose order and have fallen back under barrages of rocks when they approach the crowds, they have been successful in protecting some establishments from the crowds. Both police and private security have used tear gas to disperse crowds. Protesters accused the city government and police of ignoring the problem for years, blamed the federal government for failing to control El Alto's growing youth drug problem, and called for Mayor Nava's resignation. Nava had replied October 16 that he did not have the economic resources or manpower to control the bar and brothel scene, but on October 17 said he would keep illegal establishments closed. Municipal Council Chairman Gustavo Morales assured that new regulations to limit pub hours and expand the minimum distance between schools and bars and brothers would be passed October 19 and end the protests. It is unclear, however, how the city would enforce the rules considering 70 percent of El Alto's total 2,500 bars operate illegally. Meanwhile, local prostitutes threatened to march nude and work without health precautions should the protests continue.

#### Here Comes the Neighborhood: Altenos Lead Embassy Protest

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¶5. (U) Two El Alto civic groups (FEJUVE: Federation of United Neighbors of El Alto and the COR: Central Workers Union of El Alto) led and helped organized a separate October 17 protest aimed at Embassy La Paz (reftel). About 2,000 El Alto and La Paz residents attended the protest to support the extradition of ex-president Gonzalo (Goni) Sanchez de Lozada from the U.S. for alleged crimes stemming from lethal confrontations during 2003 demonstrations/blockades. The protest prevented ingress or egress at the Embassy from about 1200 to 1330. Protesters lobbed fireworks, dynamite (that did not detonate), and rocks over the Embassy walls. They also brought the casket and corpse of a man who allegedly died the previous day from wounds sustained during the 2003 protest.

#### Deputy: Evo Good, City Bad, Mayor Worse

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¶6. (C) MAS deputy Oscar Chirinos Alancoa told PolOffs October 17 it is impossible to predict when El Alto protests will "ignite" and when they will dissipate. He claimed some hooligans took advantage of the protests to steal and vandalize during the nights. Chirinos said although he laments any violence that spoils El Alto's supposed reputation as a "revolutionary, but peaceful" city, this round of protests should come as no surprise. He asserted parents have reached a boiling point after years of escalating encroachment of bars and brothels. He accused bar owners of soliciting adolescents to "turn them into alcoholics." Chirinos came touting "ideas" to offer

alternatives for wayward youth, but pointedly said he had not and would not partner with the city government. He claimed President Evo Morales is asking for concrete proposals for national pilot programs in El Alto that would skip the city. He also blamed the city government for inaction amidst rising insecurity and crime and blasted the mayor's office for collusion with the illegal activity. Ironically, Chirinos was forced to wait out the protest inside the Embassy until his fellow Altenos dispersed.

¶7. (C) Comment: The million-strong tinderbox of El Alto continues its tradition of launching protests in El Alto city and in neighboring La Paz. Altenos are expert mobilizers (often paying "protesters" for their services) and, despite their reputation as a bastion for the government, will target anyone or thing they perceive against El Alto's interests. In three days they mobilized in large numbers against the federal government, the city government, the mayor, the police, bars, brothels, and the U.S. The parents' threat to blockade if Morales does not meet their demands must be worrisome to Evo given that he well knows how effective these measures can be -- they brought down the Sanchez de Lozada government.

¶8. (C) El Alto is a difficult force to control and politicians should be wary lest they reap the whirlwind: Nava's march soon morphed into calls for his resignation and damage to the city. As has become customary in October, Goni is once again the focus of protests directed at the U.S. Embassy. Although the Bolivian Government still has not presented its extradition request and has now said it will do so in November, it has been fanning the flames of outrage about the case consistent with its current upswing in attacks against the U.S. (USAID, visas, moving the UN, etc.). We can expect future protests, particularly after the Bolivian Government begins to advance its case against Goni in earnest. GOLDBERG